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SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA, NSC FOR NENA - SHAPIRO/KUMAR

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SUBJECT: ABU ALA'A ON RECONCILIATION AND THE FATAH CONGRESS

REF: A. JERUSALEM 1096  
B. JERUSALEM 1183

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. In a July 13 meeting with the Consul General, Fatah Central Committee member Ahmed Qurei (Abu Ala'a) expressed optimism the Fatah General Congress will occur on schedule, but said he "can't exclude surprises." His main concern is whether Hamas will allow Gaza-based delegates to attend. He expressed optimism regarding SARG promises to facilitate delegates' travel from Lebanon and Syria. On reconciliation, Abu Ala'a said discussions remain deadlocked on all the key issues, and commented that the current proposal for a factional committee would legitimize Hamas control in Gaza. With regard to negotiations with Israel, Abu Ala'a said the GOI must meet its Roadmap obligations or it will be impossible for the Palestinians to participate in meaningful negotiations. End Summary.

Fatah Congress: "Can't Exclude Surprises..."  
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¶2. (C) Abu Ala'a led off with his assessment of prospects for the August 4 Sixth Fatah Congress. He said the Congress will be successful if it (1) reaffirms Fatah unity; (2) avoids a fractious debate on the political program; and (3) elects a leadership which can "carry the burden of the national liberation project." However, he said he cannot rule out surprises. At the Fifth Congress (in 1989), he noted, even Arafat's legendary powers of persuasion were not enough to secure a seat for any of his candidates on the Fatah Central Committee (FCC).

¶3. (C) With regard to the political program, Abu Ala'a said he understands U.S. concerns about avoiding an outcome which could jeopardize a resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Nonetheless, he predicted some difficulty in keeping "different points of view" behind closed doors, particularly on the issue of settlements. The Consul General stressed the importance of avoiding language, whether in the program or elsewhere, which could escalate an ongoing war of words with the Israelis. Abu Ala'a said Fatah members understand if they turn their backs on President Obama now they will not be able to achieve anything vis-a-vis the Israelis. "Everyone understands this Administration represents a real change," he added.

¶4. (C) Regarding conference preparations, Abu Ala'a (who chairs the preparatory committee) said he is currently focused on finalizing the agenda and delegate list. The imminent release of the list of 1550 delegates will lead to pressure from those who were left off, he said. With regard to Fatah delegates traveling from abroad, Abu Ala'a said

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had promised to facilitate the transit of delegates from Lebanon and Syria. Al-Asad also promised to press Hamas to allow Gaza-based Fatah delegates to travel.

¶5. (C) Two issues could complicate plans for the Congress, Abu Ala'a noted. If the Gaza delegates cannot attend, "I'm afraid there will be problems," he said without elaborating. He also worried about FCC member-in-exile Farouq Qaddumi's public criticism. While he downplayed Qaddumi's influence, "these statements could create a negative dynamic among his remaining supporters." Much depends on whether Syria or Iran attempt to interfere with the Congress. Abu Ala'a was optimistic regarding the former but worried Iran might seek to deflect attention from its internal problems by creating problems elsewhere in the region.

¶6. (C) Finally, Abu Ala'a said the U.S. should "keep silent" during the Congress and avoid any public indication of support. Where we could be helpful, he added, is in encouraging the GOI to facilitate the preparations and access for attendees. It was also important to avoid a situation like that of the May 2008 Bethlehem Investment Conference, when the Israelis posted prominent signs welcoming participants at the Allenby bridge and checkpoints leading to Bethlehem.

#### Negotiations: Worries About Unilateral Israeli Actions

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¶7. (C) Abu Ala'a predicted difficulties in launching negotiations without clear Israeli adherence to Roadmap obligations. In addition to settlements, he described the GOI's recently announced plan (Ref A) to seek registration of 139,000 dunums (35,000 hectares) of land between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea as "very dangerous." Abu Mazen is not trying to obstruct negotiations by setting "preconditions," he said, but compliance with Roadmap obligations is essential to building the political foundation for the negotiating phase. "Israel needs to understand his problem... the question is not whether (Abu Mazen) is a weak or strong leader. It is about what is possible in the current context.

The (Palestinian) people simply won't salute him if he decides to move ahead (into negotiations)." Abu Ala'a said PM Netanyahu's public offer to begin negotiations immediately is an attempt to deflect U.S. and international pressure about settlements.

#### Update on Reconciliation Talks

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¶8. (C) Abu Ala'a (who is the titular head of the Fatah delegation to the reconciliation talks) said little progress has been achieved to date on substantive issues. "The real issue is who will control the government," he noted. Hamas believes it can circumvent the Quartet principles by passing its proposals to other interlocutors, such as former President Carter. Abu Ala'a compared Hamas' tactics today with Fatah's own illusions thirty-five years ago. "In Beirut one of our members would exchange words with a U.S. Embassy employee and we would all rejoice," he said. "I just don't understand their strategy." Hamas' fundamental objective is to maintain control of Gaza, Abu Ala'a said. Controlling territory improves their position vis-a-vis the Palestinian Authority and the international community. "It also allows them to build a base for the Muslim Brotherhood in the region," he noted. Hamas wants to restore its reputation after the Gaza conflict by receiving credit for reconstruction. The Consul General said there are no shortcuts to Hamas acceptance of the Quartet principles.

¶9. (C) For its part, Abu Ala'a said, Fatah's position remains clear: it will accept an agreement only if it will not lead to a reimposition of the "siege" on the PA and will allow reconstruction of Gaza to begin. Abu Ala'a said Egyptian General Intelligence Director Omar Suleiman had replied obliquely to him that "we will see" what the international community will accept. When the last round of negotiations

(June 27-28) deadlocked, the Egyptians proposed the idea of a joint committee to the participants. The proposal included language calling for coordination between Hamas-controlled "ministries" in Gaza and the PA government. Abu Ala'a said he was not convinced by Suleiman's assurances that PM Salaam Fayyad would be the sole address for reconstruction funds. "Hamas is not naive, they will exploit this language later." The Fatah delegation believed the committee as proposed would essentially become a "central government on top of two governments" and rejected the proposal.

¶10. (C) Abu Ala'a outlined the status of other key issues as follows:

---Security: Hamas control of Gaza is "100 percent" complete. Fatah seeks reactivation of 30,000 former Palestinian Authority Security Force members (PASF) in Gaza. Hamas initially refused, but in the last round offered to accept an initial deployment of 300 at Rafah, with a gradual increase to 3000 by January 2010.

---Elections: "We want elections on January 25 and Hamas wants to postpone them," Abu Ala'a said.

---Prisoners: Hamas linked the issue of its West Bank detainees to the reconciliation talks during the last round. Abu Ala'a said "we told (Hamas negotiators) those who violate the law, possess arms, or smuggle weapons will be arrested. But we won't arrest anyone (solely) because of their politics."

¶11. (C) According to Abu Ala'a, during the recent (July 9-10) visit to the West Bank, EGIS representatives sought written positions from Hamas and Fatah. Abu Ala'a said "they heard our same position again." He confirmed Abu Mazen has asked the Egyptians to delay the next round of talks beyond the Fatah Congress, and predicted the Egyptians will agree.

¶12. (C) With regard to the factional committee proposal the Egyptians tabled during the talks, Abu Ala'a said the paper was distributed by the Egyptians, but it was not an "Egyptian proposal." Instead, he described it as an Egyptian effort to put on paper the ideas they heard from Hamas and Fatah. Comment: This is at odds with what we have heard from two other sources on his negotiating team, including his lead negotiator (Ref B). Given that Abu Ala'a's comments came shortly after the visit of the Egyptian mediators, it may be that the Egyptians have asked our Fatah interlocutors to "clarify" this point to us. End comment.

WALLES